



# The Mexican in Chicago



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# **The Mexican in Chicago**

By

**Robert C. Jones**

and

**Louis R. Wilson**



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## INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is based upon information gathered by Robert C. Jones in a survey of the Mexicans in Chicago during the years 1928-1931. The survey was carried out under the direction of the United Religious Survey of Protestantism in Chicago and presented to a Sub-Committee of the Comity Commission of the Chicago Church Federation. This Committee recommended the publication of a pamphlet based on the findings of this survey and appointed an Editorial Committee to assume charge of the publication, consisting of M. N. English, R. H. Elliot, S. C. Kincheloe, Victor E. Marriott.

It is hoped that this pamphlet may be used by various denominations in their constituencies to stimulate an interest in the Mexican and promote a better understanding of his problems as he seeks for a place in our great city's life. It can be studied by Young People's groups, Church School classes, Women's Missionary Societies and Men's Clubs. Trips might be planned to some of the Mexican Centers, thus supplementing the reading of the pamphlet with first-hand contacts.

The authors make acknowledgment for additional information to Miss Anita Edgar Jones, who conducted a survey in 1928, under the joint auspices of the Immigrants' Protective League and the School of Social Service of the University of Chicago. They are under obligations to Rev. Lacy Simms, who prepared very helpful material on the Protestant Work in Chicago and to Dr. Robert N. McLean, whose book "That Mexican" has contributed largely to the total picture here drawn.

The linoleum cuts which illustrate this pamphlet are made by Mr. William L. Ortiz, a young Mexican artist, who does his work in the studios of Hull House. Mr. Ortiz is a native of Mexico and has made his home in Chicago for some years past. The cover design is intended to portray the Mexican Yesterday and To-day. Yesterday, a peon in the fields of Mexico, to-day a worker in the steel mills of Chicago.





# THE MEXICAN IN CHICAGO

BY

ROBERT C. JONES AND LOUIS R. WILSON



## THE NEW HOME

Through the open windows of a second-story room opposite Hull House on a midsummer Saturday evening come the jazz strains of a gospel hymn being lustily sung in Spanish. If we were to trace this music to its source it would lead us into the midst of a revival meeting of the Pentecostals. There in a crowded room we would find a Mexican evangelist, eyes shining and face flushed by his enthusiasm, leading the singing, while an orchestra made up of a cornet, two drums, three triangles, and a piano beats out the rhythm with a will. But we do not wish to loiter long within doors. There are other interesting things to be seen along South Halsted during this twilight hour. The strange Spanish signs upon the shop windows put us in the mood for exploration, and we turn our steps southward along the Mexican Boulevard.

First we pass a restaurant whose brilliantly painted walls are covered by designs reminiscent of that Indian culture which Cortez and his followers so ruthlessly destroyed in their conquest of Mexico.

In the next block we pause before the window of a music store and glance at the display of ukeleles, guitars, violins, and wind instruments. This little shop makes phonographic records of music as played and as sung by Chicago's finest Spanish-speaking artists. And from here the records may find their way to the portable phonographs in the box-car homes of Mexican railroad workers all over the United States, or even in the little far-away shacks which house the migratory laborers in the sugar-beet fields.

Across the street a Mexican woman of middle age, straight black hair caught up in a knot at the back of her head, modestly garbed in a long brown skirt and green silk waist, stands beside her husband. They are looking at the primitive *metates* in the window of a grocery store—those crude, stone ironing boards with their stone rollers for crushing the water soaked kernels of corn into the paste from which the Mexican bakes his thin cakes of unleavened bread, his *tortillas*. The woman is evidently considering a purchase. A well dressed young Mexican man

passes by, escorting a Mexican girl who is smartly attired in the most modern fashion. They are probably on their way to a dance of the Azteca Club in Bowen Hall at Hull House. The older woman gazes after them in stern disapproval. Then she shakes her head. Such an immodest dress for a girl to wear in public! And to think of any young girl being out on the streets alone with her lover! Such things are never done in Mexico!



The Mexican Boulevard  
(Halsted Street)

The young man and woman are passing on up the street. As they go by a pool hall several other young Mexicans watch them enviously. Rubio always was a lucky dog! And to get such a pretty girl! The largest part of the Mexican immigration has been made up of single men or of men who have left their families in Mexico. This makes competition for the women very keen among the young men. However, the Mexican is such

a graceful dancer that he can often overcome the barriers of racial difference and secure a partner from among other nationalities. Miss Anita Edgar Jones has even found some Mexicans taking wives among the Norwegian, the Polish and the German girls. Out on the street the fortunate Rubio and his companion are pausing before the window of a Jewish clothing merchant to admire the splendidly attired wax figures of a bride and groom. The Mexican temperament loves the color and gayety of any festive occasion—especially of a wedding. And these two are young and in love. But this is not the story of Rubio. Let us return and step inside the pool hall.

The Mexican pool hall, of which there are more than fifty in Chicago, is quite as much patronized as a social center, news dispensing agency, and mutual aid society as for its more obvious purposes. And although the Mexican is growing to do more and more business with the banks which are located in the immediate neighborhood of the colony, the proprietor of the pool hall remains one of his most trusted bankers. Here the newcomer to Chicago can most easily fraternize with his fellow countrymen; be informed of the ways of the city; secure such small, friendly loans as he may at first need; inquire about the best way to find work; and later leave with the proprietor for safe-keeping such amounts from his weekly wages as he may be fearful of carrying upon his person or of leaving in his room in the cheap lodging house where he stays.

But let us end our leisurely walk down Halsted now and complete our survey of this largest of Chicago's Mexican colonies by the swifter method of general description. The colony centers around Halsted between Harrison and 15th. That is to say, it is located in the Near West Side, a locality which has been receiving newly-arrived immigrants for the past half-century and also, though scarcely by accident, a community which has some of the poorest housing in the city. Here, where rents are cheap, where employment agencies are near at hand, and where numerous industrial plants are within easy reach, is a natural place for the immigrant to begin his life in Chicago. As the successive waves of immigrants have come into the city they have always settled in such communities and then pushed outward to occupy better residential districts as their economic status has improved. As the newest arrival in the immigrant flood the Mexicans are found living in the poorest quarters in the city. The Mexicans of this colony, however, though numbering between seven and eight thousand, do not wholly fill the district. Between Harrison and Polk Streets and especially on Halsted and Blue Island, the Mexicans are in the midst of a Greek settlement. Between Polk and Roosevelt Road there is a

heavy concentration of Italians west of Halsted and of Poles to the east. North of Roosevelt Road a great many Jews and Russians are to be found.

Along Halsted Street the north and south traffic jostles and bumps and clangs its way. Maxwell resounds with the din made by the vendors on the curb market as they scream their strangely assorted wares and haggle over a difference of a few pennies on a sale. Up and down the treeless back streets dilapidated two and three-story houses elbow each other for room and struggle to give shelter to the many families who overcrowd their interiors.

On week days the Old Town Boys' Club on Newberry Avenue reaches out to serve more than two hundred Mexican boys. Firman House on Gilpin Place has its clubs for Mexican mothers and their little daughters. The Infant Welfare Society with quarters at Hull House labors to teach the mothers of the neighborhood how to overcome the rickets-producing effects of the smoke-dimmed daylight. And Hull House itself opens its classes to hundreds of Mexican students. There they are to be found in the pottery shop, the studio, the musical organizations, the dramatic association, the English classes, and the social groups.

The members of St. Mark's Presbyterian-Congregational Church hold their Sunday School and worship at 1213 Gilpin Place. The Methodists have a church at Polk and Sholto and the Baptists at Monroe and Morgan. In addition there are a number of other missions of the Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostal and other sects. But at the Church of St. Francis on Roosevelt Road the predominant Catholic background of these immigrants reveals itself. There at the special Mass conducted for the Mexicans nearly a thousand worshippers often kneel and are comforted by the beauty and upreach of the prayers offered in the universal language of the Church of Rome. There at a shrine at one side of the church their own national patron saint, Our Lady of Guadalupe, gazes upon them. From there they go out after the miracle of the Mass has been consummated, assured once more of their souls' salvation.

Such, in brief outward view, is the picture of Chicago's largest and perhaps oldest Mexican colony. It is, however, by no means the only such colony in the city.

Reference to the map on the opposite page will reveal at a glance where the chief Mexican colonies are located. The two most important areas in addition to the one already described, are the Stock Yards district and the South Chicago area. In the Stock Yards district there are three distinct colonies, the largest of which is concentrated around Ashland Avenue and

# OUTLINE MAP OF CHICAGO

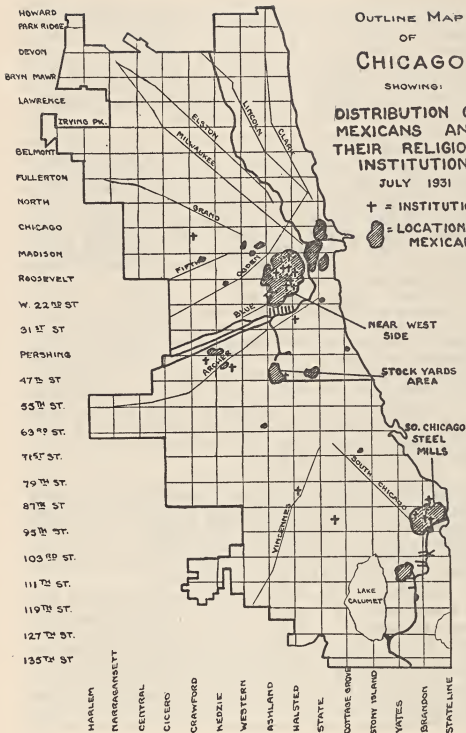
SHOWING:

DISTRIBUTION OF  
MEXICANS AND  
THEIR RELIGIOUS  
INSTITUTIONS

JULY 1931

+ = INSTITUTION

● = LOCATION OF  
MEXICANS



Forty-sixth Street. The University of Chicago Settlement has served as a center for the Mexicans in this community for a number of years. The Settlement has employed a part-time Spanish-speaking worker and several Mexican Societies have had headquarters there. This group is employed mainly in the Stock Yards. The smaller groups to the south and east of the Yards find employment with the several packing houses, the American Can Company and the railroads.

In South Chicago, the various settlements are grouped about the industries. The main colony resides in the area bounded by the Illinois Steel Company Mills on the east, Commercial Avenue on the west, the railway tracks just below Eighty-seventh Street on the north and Ninety-second Street on the south. It is estimated that there are about five thousand Mexicans in this colony which constitutes the second largest settlement in Chicago. Previous to the financial depression beginning in 1929 the Mexicans were fairly well established here with Mexican-owned shops catering to their own people. A number of social and recreational societies are actively functioning and both Protestant and Catholic churches with a Mexican constituency are to be found. These include Our Lady of Guadalupe Roman Catholic Church; the First Mexican Baptist Church of South Chicago; the Baptist Mission of Our Savior and the United Mexican Evangelical Church (Congregational). The great majority of the men are employed by the Illinois Steel Company.

About three hundred Mexicans are living near one of the north gates of the Illinois Steel Company in what is called "The Bush", north of the *Belt Line* tracks between Eighty-seventh and Eighty-sixth Streets.

Another group is located on Torrence Avenue between One Hundred Fourth and One Hundred Seventh Streets just to the west of the Wisconsin Steel Company Mills. Most of the men are employed by the Wisconsin Steel Company. There are a number of Mexican stores in this community but the settlement is really dependent upon the main South Chicago colony for most of its organized social and religious life.

In addition to these main colonies already described, there is a small colony in Brighton Park, mostly employees of the Santa Fe Railroad, the Crane Company Plant and the McCormick Works. On West Madison Street between Clinton and Halsted with its cheap hotels and its employment agencies are to be found the highly mobile population of Mexican men, transients who have just arrived or who are seeking employment on the railroads and outside the city. Between three and six hundred Mexicans are to be found here at any one time, varying

according to economic conditions. There are several thousand Mexicans located in railway camps in and about Chicago—camps of varying size and condition. In some the workers live in tumble-down shacks, while in one or two the majority live in cottages having no immediate relationship to the camp. These are the most isolated groups of Mexicans in Chicago but a ministry is carried on for these men by Rev. Lacy Simms, head of the Presbyterian-Congregational work for Mexicans.

There are a number of smaller clusters of Mexicans living in the city who in general are more Americanized than the others. These are to be found for the most part in the rooming house and cheaper apartment house areas and are made up of single men and families occupying a position of relative economic advantage. Examples of such groups are to be found among those who live in the neighborhood of the Wilson Avenue Elevated Station and in Woodlawn.

## THE OLD HOME IN MEXICO

But we cannot hope to understand the Mexican in Chicago by merely knowing where he lives, or even how he lives. We need to know something of his hopes and disappointments, his dreams and his bewilderments. If we are really to discover these things we must see him as he once lived in Mexico, and know the forces which impelled him to enter the United States.

Most of the Mexicans in Chicago come from small rural communities of two or three hundred inhabitants each in the thickly populated west-central states of Jalisco, Michoacan, Guanajuato and Zacatecas. The western portions of Jalisco, and Michoacan slope down over the coastal range to the Pacific and have a tropical climate, but the larger portion of this territory lies upon the temperate central plateau in a land of perpetual springtime. It is a region of blue skies, snow-capped mountains, fertile valleys, and swift-running rivers. By the aid of irrigation the soil produces abundant crops. There are valuable timbers and rich deposits of minerals. Many flocks of sheep and goats are pastured.

Yet in the midst of this richness the Mexican has lived in grinding poverty and in ignorance for hundreds of years. In the four states mentioned, according to the 1910 census, less than four per cent of the heads of families owned any property, and less than twenty per cent could read and write. Before the revolution the common wage for peon labor was twenty-five cents



**Mexican Basket-Weaver**

per day. The coming of the Spaniards under Cortez in 1519 spelled doom for the earlier civilization of the Indians. Between the secular conquerors on the one hand who, when their gold hunting had ended, settled down as large landed proprietors on



their richly dowered *haciendas*, and the Church on the other hand with its land and its tithes, the Indian was completely dispossessed. More, he was soon effectively bound to the land by a vicious system of starvation wages and debt slavery known as peonage. Ninety per cent of the people came to exist in slavery, ten per cent to own the land. The present government of Mexico, beginning with Obregon, has made a heroic struggle to give back to the peon his rightful heritage of land and of educational opportunities, yet the long period of revolution was in itself another severe trial to the common people. Marauding bands of soldiers continually robbed them of what little they had.

The villages themselves are made up of little, one-to-three-room adobe houses with hard-packed earthen floors and the crudest of furnishings. Yet they are not unlovely after their own fashion. The soft color tones of the adobe walls take on life beneath the same sun that flashes from their red-tiled roofs. Flowers grow in abundance. And no village is so poor that it does not boast the terra cotta walls and yellow-tiled towers of an ornate church. On Sunday the villagers will all attend mass within that church. And they will linger there to buy votive candles and set them burning before the shrine of the patron saint of the village. Of necessity, life for these people is hard and is lived upon a very primitive level. However, it is lived in the midst of natural beauty; it is held firm and sure by the unquestioned operation of social customs centuries old; and it is fortified by a simple faith centering about the village saint. Occasionally, as at Christmas or Easter or the Saint's Day, it is brightened by colorful festivals with their music and dancing and feasting.

The simple folk Catholicism of these village residents is well brought out in the following fragment taken from the life history of a Chicago resident.

"In Mexico it was the custom for there to be a little church or chapel in each *barrio* or community. Each one has its patron saint and all the people living there worship that saint. On the large *haciendas* there is a little chapel also and the saint there generally has the name of the owner. The *hacienda* where we lived was owned by Don Miguel de Zepeda so that the saint in the little chapel was San Miguel. It was a large image and all of the people were very fond of it. At certain times of the year festivals were held in honor of the saint. It was very pretty. There were flowers, fireworks, and colored paper decorations.

"After a while Don Miguel sold the *hacienda* to another man whose name was not Miguel and moved to Saltillo. Since the saint belonged to the Zepeda family, after they got settled in Saltillo they wanted to take it away from the *hacienda*, and

have it in Saltillo. The peons on the hacienda, however, didn't want their saint taken away. They said that it was San Miguel who made the crops grow. It was San Miguel who had cured them when they were sick. He couldn't be taken away."

To make a long story short, the outcome was that Don Miguel had the image spirited away at night and set up on his new hacienda at Saltillo. When this was discovered by the peons their faith was not wrecked but rather increased because it was believed that San Miguel by his miraculous power had transferred the image to the new location.

It must not be taken too readily for granted, however, that all Mexicans in Chicago have one common background of quiet village life, or that they share one common cultural level, or religious faith. Within the limits of a pamphlet it is not possible to paint the complete picture. It will be sufficient to remark that there are in Mexico many gradations of racial strains from the pure Indian type, through the predominating Spanish and Indian mixed blood or mestizo types, to the negligible percentage of pure white stock. There are numerous Indian tongues and dialects spoken, even to the exclusion of Spanish in some sections. According to Robert McLean there are between 50,000 and 90,000 Protestants in this Catholic country. And while the majority of Chicago immigrants have come from the small villages of the west-central states many have had more widely traveled experiences through following various trading occupations or through life in the army. A small group comes from the cities. The Chicago colonies count within their numbers Mexican "artists", teachers, and former middle-class business men from the large centers.

## THE CALL OF THE NORTH

In 1911 Porfirio Diaz, the dictator-president of Mexico, was overthrown in the first of a long series of revolutions. In the years which followed, the country was swept by one band of rebels after another—often little better than bandits. Peon and trader alike suffered under their raids. In 1914 the outbreak of the World War inaugurated a period of unparalleled prosperity for American industry and of great demand for labor. The entrance of the United States into that war drained thousands of men from industry and made the labor shortage acute. All of this resulted in an open welcome for the Mexican laborer, especially in the Southwest where he came to pick cotton, to tend sugar beets, to work in the fruit and vegetable industry of the

Imperial Valley and the California coast, and to man the railroad section crews. The war-time stimulation of industry had scarcely died away when limitation of immigration from all countries save those of the western hemisphere caused United States industries to make new demands for laborers from south of the Rio Grande. The automobile industry of the north now joined in the welcome to the Mexican. In 1923 the Illinois Steel Mills imported a group of Mexican laborers from Fort Worth, Texas. Meanwhile there had been going on in Mexico a steady increase in the building of railroads and the construction of highways. There was a new freedom in the travel both of news and of men.

Under such conditions the slow trickle of Mexican labor across the border in 1911 rapidly enlarged to the proportions first of a river, then a flood. Letters began to make their way back into the homes of those families whose relatives or friends had gone to the United States. Those letters told of a land of peace and plenty where men were paid three to six dollars a day in wages. Such sums were hard to comprehend. Often the marvelous character of the story grew as it was repeated. The more adventurous, and especially the footloose, began to make their way toward the border in increasing numbers. The single men, naturally, made up the greater part of this movement, followed by those family men who could make arrangements to leave their families behind until growing wealth would justify bringing them into the new home. Lastly came the family groups who moved north as units. This immigrant flood was checked during the depression of 1921 but renewed in 1922 and 1923. Writing in 1928 Robert McLean estimated that at least one-eighth of Mexico's total population was then living in the United States. Today, with a severe industrial depression upon us and quota laws threatening against the Mexican, the stream has dwindled to a trickle once more. Thousands of Mexicans are returning to Mexico to escape starvation in the United States. Yet even so it is doubtful if the actual number of Mexicans in the United States is being materially reduced—the birth rate being taken into consideration.

It would be both interesting and highly worth while, albeit a pain to our conscience, to track the paths of this Mexican immigration out through the fruit and vegetable fields of California and the beet fields of Colorado and other states. That record of a seasonal employment, low wages, poor housing, child labor, interrupted school life, and impaired health has much to tell us. We are primarily interested in how the Mexican got to Chicago. In brief, the roads he traveled were these: 1. As a worker in the maintenance gangs of those railroads piercing the South-

west he was transferred from point to point until he reached the railroad workers' camps in the outlying sections of Chicago. 2. Employment agents of the steel industry hired him in the Southwest and brought him here directly. 3. He came directly to Chicago to find work on the representations of friends who were already working here and reported wages to be good. 4. At the close of the beet season in Michigan and Minnesota he came to the city to seek employment rather than return south.

## AND NOW HE IS HERE

And now that the Mexican is in Chicago we wonder how he has been welcomed, and what he is thinking. As we have already seen, we find him living in the shabbiest quarters in the city—not from choice but from economic necessity. When the Mexican first arrives he has but scant wealth and must take what he can afford. Moreover, he must live close to his work. And, so far as that is concerned, it is only in such disorganized sections of the city as exist in these manufacturing, commercial quarters that the Mexican is made welcome. The landlords of our prouder residential districts have not wished to rent to Mexicans. Once started within a given neighborhood the colony grows by the ties of race. The bewildered newcomer naturally seeks out a place to live among his fellows.

Here within the colony the Mexican at first finds a strong spirit of group cohesion. Later he may cross dividing lines which will separate him from some of his fellows by binding him more closely to others in some of the numerous social, mutual aid, patriotic, and religious organizations which come into being as the colony establishes a permanent character. Always, however, there is a strong element of group consciousness exercising a general governing control over the entire colony through the force of public opinion. And for the needy newcomer there is the utmost hospitality and readiness to share with his need. The Mexican is very charitable and hospitable where the barriers of suspicion are not raised. But be his welcome within the colony as friendly as it may, the newcomer is not relieved of the painful necessity of making difficult adjustments to a bewildering new world.

In the field of industry the Mexican soon finds that he is welcomed only as an unskilled laborer at jobs which are the dirtiest and most uncomfortable. At such jobs he is wanted when labor is in demand, but in time of depression he is apt to be among the first to be laid off. Then, too, as he comes into competition with other labor, his distinct racial characteristics

set him off as a person to be sneered at and hated. In Chicago the feuds between Mexicans and Poles are well known among all social workers.

The crowded conditions of housing in smoke-filled neighborhoods together with the low economic level result in ill health among many, especially among the babies.

But there is a strain upon the moral health also. This is due to the great proportion of single men and the small number of women in the colonies. The thwarted sex life of the men is all too apt to break across the normal social restraints, and these dangers are aggravated by the fact that many married couples, struggling to make a living, fill their houses with roomers and boarders. There is another phase of this same peril. The Mexican girl finds an entirely different standard of women's dress prevailing in this country. There is a freedom which in Mexico would have constituted an open invitation to male advances. Often enough economic necessity itself demands of the girl that she dress in modern fashion if she would win a job. Once persuaded of this she is apt to go to extremes in her modernity. The men do not understand.

## **THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT'S REACTION TO THE PROTESTANT MESSAGE**

Although accurate statistics as to the number of Protestants in Mexico are not available a good estimate would be that not more than one out of every two hundred of the entire population claimed that faith. In Chicago, however, one Mexican out of about every thirty is a member of a Protestant denomination or sect. What accounts for this difference? First of all, a much larger number of Protestant Mexicans have migrated from Mexico than their percentage of the total population there would indicate. Then from the time they leave Mexico the Mexicans are constantly being ministered to both materially and spiritually by the Protestant missionaries—in the cotton and beet fields, on the railroads and in the larger industrial centers. Many are won to the new faith.

A great protest has risen on the part of the Roman Church against what they call a proselyting movement. It has been said that the Protestants have disorganized the religious life of the Mexicans by showing them supposed weaknesses in the Catholic Church and have offered them nothing in return; that they have "bought" members through their social service and relief work and that since "the Mexicans are one hundred per cent Catholic they are not subjects of missionary endeavor."

It should be remembered, however, that there are very few Catholics in Mexico whose faith has been developed and shaped by systematic instruction and enlightened teaching. The Catholicism of the Mexican is principally a folk Catholicism developed through tradition and which has incorporated within itself a great deal of Indian and Spanish superstition. However beautiful it may be, however blind the devotion, such a faith is inadequate when the individual moves to a new and more complex environment where a multitude of new problems must be met. In Chicago, at least, in spite of occasional prejudice, some blindness and ignorance and at times overzealousness, the service of the Protestant Mexican missions has been to gather up the bewildered, those who are lost and those who are actively striving to find a better way of living. Very few persons whose lives were strongly organized about the Catholic Church have been taken from that church although many have been given a broader view of their faith and a new appreciation of others.

The Protestant Mexican Churches in Chicago have made four outstanding contributions to the religious life of the people they are striving to serve. (1) They have furnished a church home for those Mexicans who claim the Protestant faith. (2) They have provided groups where individuals who are seeking a "better life" mutually stimulate each other. (3) They have furnished an organization and standards about which many disorganized individuals have been able to orient their lives. (4) Through competition they have stimulated the Roman Church to action in serving its people, moving it to give greater attention than formerly to the intellectual development of its members and to furnish them with more adequate social life through the Catholic Societies.

But let us see what the Mexican himself thinks of the churches and missions with which he comes in contact. Of course, the variety of reactions is as great as the variety of individuals. Many are indifferent.

Epiménio Gonzales is an artist whose life is largely centered around his art and the social settlement in which he has his studio. He is quite indifferent to all forms of organized religion, although he still says that he is a Catholic. He says:

"My impression is that a comparatively small number of Mexicans go to church. That is probably due to a number of reasons. I don't go because I don't care much about it, and I work so that I stay in bed Sunday morning. I also go to parties and dances Saturday night and stay up late. I think a lot of Mexicans see that the Americans do not go to church so they follow their example. There are a lot more things to do here than in Mexico."

Most of the members of the Mexican Protestant Churches in Chicago belong to the lower middle class. It is difficult for a person of different standards and ideas to find a place in them.

Dario Orozco is a student who has had educational opportunities which place him on an intellectual level superior to that of most of his fellows. He was born and raised a Protestant. On being asked why he was one of the few educated Mexicans who regularly attended a Mexican Mission Church, he answered:

"The reason why I go to the Mexican Church instead of to an American is because I was brought up to believe that I had an obligation to help my countrymen, especially those who have not had as much opportunity as I have had. I know a number of young Mexicans here who are Protestants but who either go to American churches or don't go to any church. They all have had a better education than the average and some of them are students here. The real reason they don't come is because they don't fit in with the other members of the church."

Dario has learned the often difficult way of getting along with his less privileged countrymen on a basis of equality and without condescension. There are no widely differing Mexican Protestant churches in Chicago, so that those belonging to different social classes must work together in close communion with one another or not at all.

Jose Mendoza is a quiet, sensitive, mystical man who likes to dream. Although he has been attending the Protestant Church for two years, the beautiful ritual of the Roman Church still has a strong appeal and he sends his children to a Parochial School.

"When I came to Chicago five years ago I don't know what went wrong with me. At times I thought that I must be crazy. I was very unhappy and at times I even wanted to take my life. My wife knew that I wasn't happy and told me to go to the Catholic Church and confess myself. I would go but I wasn't satisfied. When I heard the church bells ringing, I felt glad but after I had gone to Mass I felt sad again. No one seemed to care about me. Everything was strange and there didn't seem to be anything which would satisfy me. Finally one day when I was crossing the street one of my little boys ran ahead of me. As he was crossing, a taxicab rounded the corner at full speed. It swept my boy off the curb and killed him. It was a terrible blow. \* \* \* It was at the time of the loss of this child that I found the Protestant Church. It was just about then that I heard it rumored where I could find a Protestant Church. I knew that they had the Bible there, and that was what I wanted. I felt that if I could find that book I could find some satisfaction for my disturbed mind."

Unemployment, death and sickness are times of extraordinary crisis to the Mexican immigrant. Not only does he often lack the supporting help of relatives and friends but the traditional ways in which these problems have been met are no longer adequate.

Jose goes on to tell how he found the Protestant Church at this time of need.

"One Sunday morning I told my wife that I was going to condemn myself; I was going to a Protestant Church. I asked her whether I should go alone or not and she said, 'You know that I would go anywhere with you. We will both go together.' So we started out. It happened that the pastor met us. He saw that we were lost so he asked us what we were looking for. We told him we were looking for a Bible. He then told us that the church service was going to begin very soon and that we should go in and wait. When we saw the good people that were there we said to ourselves, 'We have found more than we were looking for.' We also enjoyed the sermons. I was happy again and found satisfaction.

I might say here that although Americans have never mistreated or abused me they have rarely been friendly to me. I have been more or less of a fixture in a house, a useful tool but of no particular concern to anyone. When the pastor showed himself to be so friendly, I was anxious to find out why it was that this American was so much interested in me.

I am very happy in the Church. I have not only learned and grown spiritually, but I have also been helped in my problems. After God, it has been the pastor who has helped me most."

Pedro Hernandez has a back-ground which is strongly Indian. He has never had any schooling but has greatly improved himself intellectually in the church through his efforts to take an active part and his desire to find opportunities for self-expression leading a Sunday School Class or a Christian Endeavor Meeting. His standards of living have been greatly raised since he joined the church. In Spanish which clearly tells of his Indian origin he tells the following story.

"When I was working on the railroad in Harvey, Illinois, an American who was working there invited me to go to church and I went several times although I could understand hardly any English. They offered to give me clothes and a lot of things and asked me if I needed anything. It made me wonder why those people were so good to me.

Two years ago I was out of work for about five months. I was getting in a pretty desperate condition. People kept telling me that if I went to the pastor of the church or joined the church I would get a job. I didn't want to do that though. It seemed to me that if a person joined the church he should do so with a willing heart. I stuck to my principles to the last and didn't go to the church for help. Finally once when I was at my rope's end I sat down and prayed. I didn't know



how to pray then like I do now but I prayed anyway. It seemed to me as though it were the thing to do. I promised Christ that I would accept Him and join the Church if I got a job. I got a job so I joined the church.

My relations to my family have changed since I joined the Church. My entire life has taken on new meanings. Before I joined the Church I wouldn't last any time at all at my work. I would quit for no reason at all and I would get angry at the boss and ask for my check if any little thing happened wrong. That doesn't happen any more. I used to drink and dissipate. After I joined the church it seemed perfectly easy to quit. It was in the church I came to understand the harm drinking does. I used to throw away as much as fifty or a hundred dollars on a spree, but now I am in the Church I save all that, and I am more careful in the way I spend my money."

Mathew Concha has a rather keen and analytical mind. Although he has left his original church to join the Protestant he sees many points of strength in the Roman church and conceives of the Protestant Church among the Mexicans at least as very largely a liberalizing influence. He is of almost pure white ancestry, and this has opened ways into American life which are closed to most of his countrymen. He has a strong character, and is one of the main pillars of the church. He is one of the few Mexicans who has become an American citizen.

Tomas Echaverria, a mason, was once a very ardent Catholic. He aspired to be a priest. Then came the Mexican revolution and its liberal ideas and along with them came doubt. With this doubt came a desire to completely reshape his life. First he read Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and after going through the agony of having all of his past ideas torn and shaken he began to reconstruct his life following the philosophy of William James. Although only a grammar school graduate he is quite widely read, has a library of a hundred volumes or more and likes to study. He finds the Mexican Protestant Mission too orthodox and too far removed from the scientific and philosophical world with which he has come in contact for it to appeal very much to him.

"I have never been especially attracted by the Protestant Church. Its teaching does not agree with what I learned in physiology and natural science. I would like to find some group which was thoroughly modern to which I could belong, some philosophy of life which I could follow, something which would unify my thinking."

He enjoyed a visit to one of the liberal American Churches in Hyde Park, but did not feel at home there because his background and work were so different from that of most of the members who were business and professional people.

David Alvarado, still a Catholic, has come to appreciate the good in the Protestant Church and no longer considers those who claim that faith as followers of the devil. He has seen the good which it has worked in the lives of his friends, but feels that he is best satisfied to remain in the church in which he was born and raised.

These statements indicate the influences as well as the problems of the Protestant Churches among the Mexicans.

The members of these Mexican Churches, like most church members, are not perfect. Yet the power of the church has been proved in the helping of some to hard-fought moral victories. There is the case of Pablo Rodriguez. Pablo was both a drunkard and a gambler. When labor was scarce he was hired in spite of these habits. Now, in a time of depression, he has been retained in his factory, so he believes, because his church helped him to become a Christian.

Juan Lema has become a sober man, his marital troubles have disappeared, and he testifies to greater satisfaction in life since Christ gives him daily victory—greater satisfaction now even without a job than when he had work but didn't know Christ.

Jose Donato has learned self-control since joining the church. He can now cooperate with others because he now trusts others.

Growth in initiative, ability to cooperate according to parliamentary procedure, increasing interest and ability in self-expression, together with a steady development of character—this is the story of the Mexican as he has taken part in Protestant church life.

The Mexican Protestant churches with their present active resident membership of some four hundred persons have had a history of more than seventeen years. The oldest organized church, however, is only four years old.

During these seventeen years of Protestant work several times more than the present membership have felt the influence of these churches. The aid which these churches have provided in matters of health, the finding of employment, material relief, personal problems, educational classes, etc., is deeply appreciated by the Mexican colony, so that the real influence of Protestantism is far greater than that indicated by any mere numerical test. A great number of persons who have made a contact with the church, and received help have now moved on.

The Mexican Protestant churches in Chicago, with full-time pastors, all have approximately the same number of active

members each, sixty to eighty adults. The number of children seems to depend upon the amount of time which the workers can give to them. The only occasions on which the attendance rises above the number indicated above are when special public programs are given. The Pentecostal Church during its 1929 revival increased to more than three hundred, but only for a very limited time.

This suggests the importance of the Protestant Mission Church as a social group which stabilizes the life of its members. The Mexican, accustomed as he is to living in close and intimate relations with his neighbors, feels the need of associating himself with his fellow countrymen in groups where he can find opportunities for self-expression and standards which he can apply to the changing situation in which he finds himself. On migration, practically all of the Mexican's old associations are broken and unless he is already more or less accustomed to the atomized life of the city he feels lost and bewildered. The church group, with the personal and intimate contacts which it furnishes, gives him the controls which he needs.

In spite of the good work which has been done, the Mexican Protestant Churches have certain problems which call for the co-operation of the American Churches.

The Mexican Protestant Church has come into being far too often as a mere adaptation of the problem of an older, dying neighborhood church and has not been given the trained leadership necessary to fit it adequately for coping with the many needs peculiar to the Mexican immigrant. The pastor of an immigrant church has generally a difficult position. The lack of trained lay leadership in the church places an unusually heavy burden upon him. He must not only be responsible for the preaching and set an example by his moral conduct, but he is also expected to attend to the financial administration of the church and to take a lead in practically all the church activities. He is often the sole intermediary between the Mexican Church and the American Churches which help support the work. In order to meet the problems of the church he must be able to interpret American life to the congregation and Mexican life to those Americans who are interested in the work. He must understand two cultures and be the master of both. In addition he must deal with an unusual number of personality problems.

The Mexican has been made exceedingly sensitive by his immigration experiences. His feelings are easily hurt. Moreover, his position as a newcomer, divorced from his old ways and thoughts and as yet but imperfectly wedded to the new, re-

sults in a highly unstable personality pattern. He is apt to be caught up in one enthusiasm today only to have tomorrow bring a compelling new idea with a new loyalty. This is but the inevitable result of the cultural shock to which he is being subjected.

The great mobility of the Mexicans, who are forced to move from one place to another in looking for a job, makes difficult the development of permanent lay leadership and the churches must instantly reach out after new members to even maintain themselves. This tends to make a repetition of the educational work necessary and makes it difficult for the church as a whole to progress as fast as its individual members of long standing. They are often brought in contact with a great variety of new ideas through the movies, newspapers and radio which it is impossible for the church as a whole to assimilate at once. This is discouraging not only to the pastor but also to those members who have been in the church for some time and who feel that an unfair burden is being placed upon them. Their interest lags as lessons are repeated. And although these difficulties would seem to be sufficient without wilfully adding more, the work has often been additionally handicapped by denominational competition.

## **MAJOR DENOMINATIONS REPRESENTED**

The major denominations carrying on work among the Mexicans are the Baptist, Congregational, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian.

The Baptists have two churches, The first Mexican Baptist Church of South Chicago, located at Ninetieth and Houston, and the Central Mexican Baptist Church at Monroe and Morgan. They also have two missions, one near Forty-seventh and Ashland, the other at 9021 Mackinaw Avenue, South Chicago. South Chicago Neighborhood House at Eighty-fourth and Mackinaw is a Baptist institution where there is a Mexican Sunday School. This denomination employs one full-time Mexican pastor and one part-time Spanish-speaking pastor in its Mexican work.

The Congregationalists and Presbyterians are united in the work of St. Mark's Church and its associated agency for social service, Firman House at 1213 Gilpin Place. Through the missionary activities of St. Mark's these two co-operating denominations also reach out to serve the box-car camps. The staff consists of a full-time Spanish-speaking American pastor, a Cuban ministerial student helper, a full-time children's worker and home visitor, and a part-time medical worker. The Congre-

gationalists also maintain a Mexican church in South Chicago in connection with the work of Bird Memorial Church at 9135 Brandon Avenue. The North Shore Congregational Church maintains an Italian and Mexican Mission on Taylor Street near Halsted.

The Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church carries on a work for Mexicans at 4309 South Mozart Street, where they employ a full-time Spanish pastor.

The Methodist Episcopal Church maintains the Church of the Good Shepherd at Polk and Sholto Streets as well as the welfare work of Marcy Center at Maxwell and Newberry. They employ a full-time Porto Rican pastor and a woman visitor.

## THE MEXICAN—HIS PLACE AMONG US

The question is, what place will we make for the Mexican in our American life? Undoubtedly he has a contribution to make.

The Mexican brings to us a large capacity for useful citizenship. Already he has made his labor almost indispensable during prosperous times in three major fields: in the cultivation of sugar beets and the truck farming and fruit raising industries; in the upkeep of the railroads; and in the foundries and automobile factories. Moreover, he has been found possessed of a mechanical aptitude fitting him for entrance into the skilled trades were he to be given the opportunity. But in addition to these things we find, where it has not been repressed by ill treatment and social disapproval, a native courtesy and hospitality. There is a deep mystical strain in his temperament which inclines him to religious expression. He brings a rich emotional life and a keen appreciation of color and of form capable of adding greatly to our store of artistic beauty.

Hubert Herring, Executive Director of the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America, who has made a careful study of the Mexican situation, says in a recent article, "Relations between Americans and Mexicans in the United States," Religious Education, February, 1931:

"The Mexican is an Indian in his thinking and in his gifts. He has that native feeling for beauty of line and color and tone which is today making Mexico a Mecca for lovers of art. Arriving in the United States he finds himself in the midst of a people who are intensely practical and he finds it difficult to adjust himself. In his zeal to fit into the American scene, he often forgets his own cultural heritage and seeks to do as other Americans do. The result is not happy. The drabness of the average Mexican colony in our American cities is not pleasant. \* \* \* The United States would gain immeasurably if the Mexican could bring us something of the beauty of his own land that we might have it and make it our own."

The Mexican is not inclined to seek citizenship. He has a strong feeling for his native land and a sense of racial solidarity which it is not easy to abandon. He, too, is an American and proud of that fact. Unlike the European immigrant the Mexican knows that he is not far removed from the border of his own land. Always he believes that some day he will return. Nor has he observed any warmth of welcome to United States citizenship being extended to him. He feels that his labor at unpleasant tasks has been all too gladly accepted, but that his society is not wanted. Robert McLean, recording his studies in 1928, tells us that over the entire country the number of Mexicans naturalized averages less than one hundred per year.

To quote once more from the article on "Relations between Americans and Mexicans in the United States":

"The Mexican is here and in considerable numbers. He is here to stay. We have welcomed him because he works well and cheaply. We have used him to do the tasks which Anglo-Saxons do not care to do. We have used little or no intelligence in helping him to a decent housing situation. We have given him the back alleys of our cities. We have called him 'greaser' and left him to fight his own way as best he can. We have wondered that he does not show more enthusiasm for becoming Americanized."

In view of this situation what can our Protestant Churches do to help? The Protestant Church has assisted the Mexican in his adjustment to a different civilization by its friendliness and its social service. It has also helped the more intellectual individuals, who in the new situation have largely lost their faith, to find a thought readjustment and a re-establishment of a religious faith on a new basis.

On the other hand, as has been indicated, our Protestant work has touched only a small minority of Mexicans and not always in the wisest and most effective manner.

There is more that we can do. In the first place we can study more into the history and background of the Mexican. We would then learn that the country south of the Rio Grande is something more than a place of bull-fights and revolutions; that the Mexican has a heritage not to be despised. Basically Indian, with only an overcoating of Spanish speech and customs, he represents an indigenous civilization, in many respects superior to the European system which conquered it.

We could also better provide for receiving the Mexican into our land and making a place for him. Take our Chicago situa-

tion for example, if our work were properly set up and organized, lines of communication could be established with the immigration centers in the Southwest. Advice in regard to labor conditions could be forwarded to leaders in these centers so that workingmen would not come to Chicago under false hopes of employment. Some connections could be established for those who do come so that they would not need to wander around aimlessly looking for a job. More protection against exploitation could be furnished the newcomer.

In regard to these services and what is more narrowly considered the religious field, a more adequate program could be worked out if the various denominations could unite and establish a program for metropolitan Chicago. With pooled resources the general services already indicated could be better performed. In addition a more mobile leadership could be provided so as to follow a shifting population. More beauty could be put into the places of worship for Mexicans and many educational facilities could be provided which at present are not available. In all this the Protestant Church would not seek to proselyte. Neither would it favor Americanization in the sense of reducing the Mexican variant to a dull drab monotone but rather to provide a friendly atmosphere in which the Mexican can more happily adjust himself to a new world and make his own cultural contribution to the inclusive American pattern that will some day be realized.

"E pluribus unum". So reads the legend upon the United States silver dollar, "Out of many, one." To us who are citizens of Chicago those words are an ever-present command, a call to study and to labor. With our great blocks of foreign population we are not one city but many. If tomorrow's metropolis would rise beautiful, clean, healthful, law abiding, brotherly, we must make out of these many, one. This, however, can only be done if we take the trouble to understand. It is toward the understanding of one of the newest of our immigrant groups that this pamphlet is dedicated—the 20,000 Mexicans in Chicago.

## A BOOK LIST

- Beals, Carleton: *Mexican Maze*. Lippincott, 1931. A newspaper correspondent who has been in and out of Mexico for thirteen years writes a book full of good stories.
- Chase, Stuart: *Mexico; A Study of Two Americas*. Macmillan, 1931. A good survey of Mexican history, a description of Tepoztlan, as a symbol of Mexico of today, a community of machineless men contrasted with our machine-made civilization. Sketches by Diego Rivera.
- Encyclopedia Britannica (Article on *Mexico*).
- Gamio, Manuel: *Mexican Immigration to the United States*. University of Chicago Press, 1930.
- Gamio, Manuel: *The Mexican Immigrant; His Life Story*. University of Chicago Press, 1931.
- Garcia, Manuel: *A Son's Error* (a play in ms. form.) Apply to Rev. Lacy Simms, 1213 W. Gilpin Place, Chicago, Illinois.
- Gruening, Ernest: *Mexico and Its Heritage*. Century, 1928. The most scholarly modern book on Mexico, with detailed accounts of the revolution, a full bibliography.
- Herring, Hubert and Katharine Terrill, editors: *The Genius of Mexico*. Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America, 1931. Lectures delivered before the annual summer seminar which Mr. Herring conducts in Mexico.
- Jones, Edgar Anita: *Mexican Colonies in Chicago*. Social Service Review, Vol. II, No. 4, December, 1928.
- Jones, Robert C: *Manuscripts*. (1) A Study of the Distribution of Mexican Immigrants in Chicago and outlying areas and a description of their life and institutions; (2) A History of Mexican religious groups in Chicago; (3) A case study of a church; (4) Life histories of Mexican immigrants. (In the files of the Department of Social Ethics of the Chicago Theological Seminary, 5757 University Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.)
- Redfield, Robert: *Tepoztlan, A Mexican Village*. University of Chicago, 1930. A trained anthropologist's study of a free Aztec village.
- Saenz, Moises and Herbert I. Priestley: *Some Mexican Problems*. University of Chicago, 1926.
- Smith, Susan: *Made in Mexico*. Knopf, 1930. An excellent book for children about Mexican handicrafts and popular arts.
- Survey Graphic, May, 1931. (Number devoted to *Mexicans in the United States*.)



Tannenbaum, Frank: *The Mexican Agrarian Revolution*. Macmillan, 1929. A study of revolutionary land reforms.

Taylor, Paul S: *A Series of Studies of Labor Conditions Among the Mexican Immigrants in the United States*. University of California Press.

Vasconcelos, Jose and Manuel Gamio: *Aspects of Mexican Civilization*. University of Chicago, 1926. Discusses international relations.

In addition to the list of books given above there are a number of books and pamphlets published by the various denominational boards. Many of these are for children's reading. Just a few are given below:

McLean, Robert N.: *Jumping Beans*. (Stories and Studies about Mexicans in the United States for Junior Boys and Girls.) Friendship Press, 1929.

McLean, Robert N.: *That Mexican*. Revell, 1928.

McCombs, Vernon: *From Over the Border*. Missionary Education Movement, 1925.

Means, Florence C.: *Pepita's Adventure in Friendship*. Friendship Press, 1929. (A Play for Juniors about Mexicans in the United States.) Price twenty-five cents.

Means, Florence C. and Fullen, Harriet L.: *Rafael and Consuelo*. (Stories and Studies about Mexicans in the United States for Primary Children.) Friendship Press, 1929.

Stowell, Jay: *Methodism's New Frontier*. Methodist Book Concern, 1924.

Thompson, Charles A.: *Enter the Mexican*. (Bears the imprint of several denominations.)

Write to the following headquarters for other material:

Commission on Missions of the Congregational and Christian Churches, 19 South La Salle Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Central Distributing Agency for the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., 77 W. Washington Street, Chicago, Illinois.

The Board of Home Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1701 Arch Street, Philadelphia, Pa., and to The Woman's Home Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, 420 Plum Street, Cincinnati, Ohio.





